

Speech: Fire service reform must go further and faster: article by Brandon Lewis

Last month I visited the firefighters working in gold commands in Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk responding to the flooding threats on the east coast. As always, they showed the utmost professionalism in their roles and again highlighted how dedicated our firefighters are to protecting and serving communities in their wide-ranging roles. The Prime Minister delivered radical and ambitious reforms in policing while she was Home Secretary. Last May she set out an equally ambitious reform programme for the fire service.

The aim was clear: to make the fire service more accountable, efficient and professional than ever before – so we can better protect the public. I am pleased that these reforms were met with genuine optimism from a sector which knows it must modernise to meet the changing demands upon it.

While we have been laying the groundwork for this in the last 6 months, 2017 will be the year when we see real change. Today I will update the fire service on the next stage of fire reform.

Progress has been made, but I want to us to go further and faster.

That is why I'm going to introduce independent inspection, which, for the first time, will consider the operational effectiveness of each service. This independent scrutiny will ensure fire services are held to the highest possible standards. It will bring an end to the current peer review process through which, in practice, chief fire officers handpick their own reviewer, set their own terms of reference, and decide whether or not to publish the results.

[The Prime Minister described the practice in her speech last May](#) as 'not so much marking your own homework as setting your own exam paper and resolving that you've passed'. It has to change.

I also want to further professionalise the service and to make sure that all fire personnel are offered opportunities to enhance their skills so they are equipped with the knowledge they need to provide the best possible services to their communities.

Our workforce must better represent the communities it serves. I expect services to find solutions to the current lack of diversity so clearly highlighted in the statistics we published last year, with just 4% of the workforce from an ethnic minority background and just 5% female. We can, and must, do better.

I also want to see services collaborate further in more innovative ways. Better joint working can strengthen our emergency services, deliver

significant savings to the taxpayer and – most importantly – enable them to better protect the public. Last week, the [Policing and Crime Act](#) received Royal Assent, giving the fire service the legislative platform it needs to seize collaboration opportunities.

A new duty requiring the emergency services to keep collaboration opportunities under review and to take on collaboration opportunities where it would be in the interests of efficiency and effectiveness to do so, will come into force in April. Police and crime commissioners will be able to make a local case to take on responsibility for governance of fire and rescue services, to maximise the benefits of joint working.

To ensure the public have trust in how the service is performing, services must also be more transparent. Last year, [data published for the first time by this government](#) highlighted stark differences between what different fire and rescue services were paying for similar items of uniform and kit. For example, prices that authorities pay for breathing kit were shown to range from £328 to £1,504.

That is why in 2017 we will collect and publish even more information to allow the public to compare whether their service is getting the best value for money. Services must work together much more closely to improve how they buy their kit and on what they pay for things like training and buildings, to drive down costs and maximise savings. This will demonstrate how local government can deliver sensible savings, whilst protecting frontline services and keeping council tax down.

Delivering this ambitious reform agenda does not simply rest with me, or with the government. Ultimately, the fire service itself must shape and deliver these changes. It is for their benefit and the benefit of the communities they serve, and I look forward to seeing the results.

[News story: Civil news: delivery of family mediation work from 2018](#)

From:

First published:

7 February 2017

Headline intentions document covering mediation work from 2018 published on 7 February 2017.

Our approach to family mediation work from 1 April 2018 is set out in a

headline intentions document which is now available – see link below.

The previously published headline intentions document for all other areas of civil legal aid work confirmed that existing family mediation contracts will end on 31 March 2018. This was made available on 20 January 2017 – see link below.

We also explained on 20 January that we would separately publish information giving further details about the way ahead for family mediation work.

The intention is for the delivery of family mediation services to operate under the new 2018 Standard Civil Contract from 1 April 2018.

When will the tender open?

A tender process for these contracts will open in April 2017. All organisations must successfully tender for a contract if they wish to deliver legally aided mediation services from 1 April 2018.

Service delivery remains similar

The government remains committed to family mediation as a key route to helping family disputes avoid court proceedings. So, we will not be making significant changes to the delivery of family mediation services when compared with current contracts.

Quality assurance

We will maintain the quality of mediation services under current contracts but will no longer require family mediation providers to hold the Mediation Quality Mark (MQM).

Instead, the contract will include the key quality standards set out in MQM and will require that mediators and mediation organisations meet the standards set out by the:

- Family Mediation Council
- Family Mediation Standards Board

Further details are provided in the mediation headline intentions document.

Further information

[Civil 2018 contracts tender](#) – to download mediation-specific headline intentions document and headline intentions document for all other areas of civil work

[Press release: Gloucestershire Man ordered to pay £675 for illegally fishing for elvers.](#)

Yesterday (6 February 2017) Paul Ridler, of Betjeman Close, Gloucester pleaded guilty at Gloucestershire Magistrates' Court to one charge of fishing for elvers without the appropriate authorisation.

Mr Ridler was fined £250 and ordered to pay £400 in costs, along with a £25 victim surcharge.

The charge was brought by the Environment Agency contrary to section 27B (1) of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975.

On April 7 2016, Environment Agency officers were patrolling the River Severn at Ashleworth. Officers spoke to two males, Mr Anthony Ridler and Mr Paul Ridler. Anthony Ridler confirmed he had the required authorisation to fish for elvers but Mr Paul Ridler did not have authorisation and would not be fishing.

Later that evening officers returned to find Paul Ridler in wet, muddy waterproofs and gloves with an elver net and empty bucket. Paul Ridler stated he was looking after the net for his brother who was further downstream, and this was the only net they had with them.

Officers located Anthony Ridler who was in the river further downstream with a dip net immersed in water, and confirmed he was fishing alone and indicated he was not aware his brother was using the spare net.

Paul Ridler stated to one of the officers that he was not elvering and it was a "silly mistake, which would not happen again."

Speaking after the case, Carl Salisbury, the Environment Agency officer in charge of the investigation, said:

We will continue to target those who decide to fish illegally without a licence or the correct authorisation and will work with other enforcement bodies to deal with the theft of fish.

Anyone witnessing illegal fishing incidents in progress can report it directly to the Environment Agency hotline, 0800 80 70 60. Information on illegal fishing and environmental crime can also be reported anonymously to Crime stoppers on 0800 555 111.

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News story: Ministers meet Overseas Territories to engage in Brexit process

From:

First published:

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Part of:

UK ministers held the first meeting of a new forum dedicated to discussing the implications of Brexit for the Overseas Territories.

Minister for Exiting the European Union Robin Walker and Foreign Office Minister Baroness Anelay today hosted leaders and representatives from the Overseas Territories, to ensure their interests regarding the impact of Brexit are taken into account.

Territory leaders welcomed the new forum as a means of facilitating direct and regular engagement with UK Ministers in preparation for and during the UK's negotiations with the European Union. Leaders discussed areas of high priority and opportunities for their territories.

Minister for Exiting the European Union Robin Walker said:

When the UK leaves the European Union the strong relationship we have with the Overseas Territories and the important mutual trade and business links we share will continue.

The UK Government is committed to engaging with our friends in the Overseas Territories as we prepare to exit the EU, and ensuring that we get a deal that works for everyone. In this context, we discussed how the Territories can contribute to a truly global Britain.

Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office The Rt. Hon. Baroness Anelay said:

The Overseas Territories are integral to the UK Government's ambitions to create a more outward looking United Kingdom. We are committed to taking their priorities into account as we prepare for negotiations to exit the EU.

I have discussed this very issue during my visits to the Overseas

Territories and am keen to build on this early positive engagement to ensure the deal the UK Government ultimately negotiates works for all.

The first Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council on European negotiations was attended by leaders and representatives from the following territories:

- Anguilla
- Bermuda
- British Virgin Islands
- Cayman Islands
- Falkland Islands
- Montserrat
- Pitcairn Islands
- St Helena and Ascension Island
- Tristan da Cunha
- Turks and Caicos Islands

Last week the Government published its plan for a new, positive and constructive partnership in the mutual interest of the UK and the EU, with a [White Paper](#) presented to Parliament.

The paper mirrors the [12 objectives](#) the UK Government will use to negotiate Brexit as set out by the Prime Minister last month.